

**A New Stela of Ramesses II in Jordan  
in the Context of Egyptian Royal Stelae in the Levant<sup>1</sup>**



*@ Khaled Gamelyan*

## A New Stela of Ramesses II in Jordan in the Context of Egyptian Royal Stelae in the Levant<sup>1</sup>

It was in a mosque in the southern Syrian region of Hauran, where in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century an Egyptian royal stela was identified for the first time in Western Asia. GOTTLIEB SCHUMACHER, a prominent member of the German “Templer” community from Haifa, recognized by 1891 in the village of Sheikh Sa’ad, that an almost 2 m tall standing basalt monolith in the centre of a local shrine, related by tradition to the Qur’anic and Biblical *Nabi Ayyūb*/Job<sup>2</sup>, was in fact a badly eroded pharaonic monument (Fig. 5; Schumacher 1891; *KRI* II: 223). The faint traces of relief and hieroglyphs permitted to attribute it safely to Ramesses II, who is depicted vis-à-vis a Canaanite deity.<sup>3</sup> Less than 20 km to the south of Sheikh Sa’ad, the upper half of a second stela, showing Sethos I with Amun-Ra and Mut, was noticed in 1901, built in the wall of a house in the village of Tell esh-Shihab (Fig. 3; Smith 1901: 344-349; Müller 1904; *KRI* I: 17; Brand 2000: 123-124).

Three more monumental stelae, again of Sethos I and Ramesses II, were unearthed in the 1920s at archaeological excavations at Beisan (Beth Shean) in northern Palestine.<sup>4</sup> At Tell el-

<sup>1</sup> I am obliged to the director of the ROYAL JORDANIAN DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES, DR. FAWWAZ AL-KHRAYSHEH, for authorizing this presentation of the new discovery.

<sup>2</sup> The so-called *sahrat Ayyūb*, “the stone of Job”. For a description of the village and its various sites cf. Schumacher 1886: 187-198.

<sup>3</sup> The identity of the deity has been much debated. He is depicted en face with horns protruding from an atef-crown. His composite name has not been satisfactorily explained, but it seems to contain the elements “El” and “Saphon”. Erman 1892; Erman 1893; Albright 1926: 45 n. 104; Albright 1950: 8 n. 4; Giveon 1965: 197-200.

<sup>4</sup> Stela of Sethos I (year 1): Rowe 1930: 24-29, fig. 5, pls. 41, 47/3; James 1966: 34-37, fig. 81/1; *KRI* I: 11-12; Brand 2000: 124-125. Stela of Sethos I (undated): Rowe 1930: 29-30, fig. 6, pls. 42-44, 45/1; James 1966: 34; *KRI* I: 15-16; Brand 2000: 125. Stela of Ramesses II (year 18): Rowe 1930: 33-36, pl. 46; Rowe 1940: 22, 29;

‘Ureime (Kinnereth), at the western shore of the Sea of Galilee, a small fragment with three lines of text, was found in 1928, and attributed to Thutmose III (or his successor Amenophis II).<sup>5</sup> From a later date is another small stela fragment from Megiddo, which bears the name of Sheshonq.<sup>6</sup> In Lebanon there are three rock hewn stelae of Ramesses II at the coastal road above the Nahr el-Kalb (Weissbach 1922: 17-22, pl. 5,6,9; *KRI* II: 1, 149), and another one near ‘Adhlun (Ronzevalle 1909: 793-794, pl. 11; *KRI* II: 223). Further stelae of Thutmose III, Sethos I and Ramesses II were found in Byblos<sup>7</sup> and Tyr.<sup>8</sup> Returning back to Syria, another stela of Sethos I from Tell Nebi Mond (Qadesh at the Orontes) has to be mentioned.<sup>9</sup> It was discovered back in 1921, and has remained the northernmost Egyptian royal stela to be identified until today.<sup>10</sup>

Only recently important additions can be reported to this limited group of monuments. In 1999 a new stela of Ramesses II was published, which had been discovered five years earlier by AHMED FERZAT TARAQJI, covering a Roman tomb at al-Kiswah, 15 km south of Damascus (Taraqji 1999; Yoyotte 1999; Kitchen 1999). Like all the stelae from Syria and northern Palestine, it is from local basalt. It preserves the lower half of a scene showing three male persons, possibly the pharaoh with Atum or El and Seth/Baal, and six lines of text. – The latest discovery, to be presented here for the first time<sup>11</sup>, was made in 1999 in the northern

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James 1966: 34-37, fig. 81/1; Černý 1958; *KRI* II: 150-151. Plus two fragments (undated): Rowe 1930: 36, fig. 8, pl. 49/2; Rowe 1940: xi, 33, 71, pl. 28/21; James 1966: 34-35.

<sup>5</sup> on grounds of the mentioning of *Mni*, Mitanni; Albright and Rowe 1928; Hübner 1986: 258-259.

<sup>6</sup> Fisher 1929: 12-16. - Two stone fragments with the cartouches of Ramesses II from near Gaza were published as architectural fragments. From the insufficient description it can not be excluded that they are fragments of stelae (Giveon 1975). Questionable is a fragment from Tel Delhamia in the Jordan Valley with the cartouche of Ramesses IV (Leclant 1982: 485).

<sup>7</sup> Fragment with the cartouche of Thutmose III: Dunand 1958: pl. 155 no. 13439. Two large fragments with depiction and text of Ramesses II (year 4): Montet 1928: 48-49, pl. 34; *KRI* II: 224.

<sup>8</sup> Large fragment of Sethos I (undated): Chéhab 1969: 32, pl. 8/3; *KRI* I: 117; Brand 2000: 122. Upper part of stela of Ramesses II (undated): Loffet 1999. Small fragment of Ramesses II (undated): Chéhab 1969: 33, pl. 8/4; *KRI* II: 401.

<sup>9</sup> Upper part, with the king in front of Amun, Seth, Month and Hathor. Loukianoff 1924; *KRI* I: 25; Brand 2000: 120-122.

<sup>10</sup> In the annals of Thutmose III he claims to have erected a stela at the Euphrates near Carchemish, as had his father Thutmose I (*Urk.* IV: 697). None of those have been located.

<sup>11</sup> DR. GABALLAH ALI GABALLAH, then Director of the Egyptian SUPREME COUNCIL OF ANTIQUITIES, visited the stela shortly after its discovery by invitation of the JORDANIAN DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES, and subsequently

Jordanian town of at-Turra, during a survey by the JORDANIAN DEPARTMENT OF ANTIQUITIES. Like the “Stone of Job”, the new stela is placed in a mosque, *Maqām aš-Šayḥ Ḥalīl* (Fig. 7). It is, however, not centred prominently as a venerated monument, but built in a wall pillar, close to the ground (Fig. 6). To fit into the pillar it was cut on three sides to 50 x 30 cm, and turned by 90°. It contains 8 incomplete lines of text. Due to the very rough surface of the local basalt, which is spotted by numerous smaller and larger natural cavities, the inscription is not easily readable. The ductus has thin and tall, very slightly cursive hieroglyphs. Fig. 1 shows a facsimile.

Transcription:

- 1 [...] --?-- [...]
- 2 [...] *Nprj wtf.u Gb* [...]
- 3 [...] *s]mn jw̄.w hr ns.wt=sn* [...]
- 4 [...] *rn dsr nḥb(t) nswt n Km.t* [...]
- 5 [...] *mr(j) qn rn=fqn (n) ḥ[.w ...]*
- 6 [...] *jr.t=sn m jwn.w m s.t=sn jr* [...]
- 7 [...] *bṣt.w sbtj=s*[n ...]
- 8 [...] *(Wsr-)M3̄.t-[R̄] stp-n-R̄)/ s3 R̄ (R̄-mss mrj-Jmn)/* [...]

Translation:

- 1 [...] --?-- [...]
- 2 [...] of] Nepri, begotten by Geb, [...]
- 3 [...] who [es]tablishes the heirs on their thrones [...]
- 4 [...] of] name, sacred of titulary, King of Egypt, [...]
- 5 [...] the beloved [...], brave of name, the bravest of war[riors, ...]
- 6 [...] to make them as columns at their place, to make [...]
- 7 [...] the rebels, th[eir] fortification [...]
- 8 [...] *(Wsr-)M3̄.t-[R̄] stp-n-R̄)/*, the son of Ra: *(R̄-mss mrj-Jmn)/* [...]

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reported on his encounter with the monument to the Egyptian press. That interview was published on the SCA-website (<http://guardians.net/sca/ramsesjordan.htm>).

Commentary:

line 1: Only the lower part of the line is preserved.  $\wedge$  and  $\rightarrow$  can be recognized.

lines 2-3: Nepri is a cereal god and personifies grain. The king can sometimes be addressed as “the son of Nepri”, referring to his quality as nourisher of Egypt (DZA 24.992.530, 24.992.540). Geb and Nepri are often mentioned together, the first as earth god producing plants and vegetables, and both responsible for the fertility of the ground and its products in food supply. In addition, Geb is a god of divine kingship. The kings of Egypt are considered the heirs of Geb, sitting on his throne (DZA 24.992.550, 25.295.160). Geb plays a prominent role in the Egyptian temple at Serabit el-Khadim in Sinai (Valbelle 1996), while Nepri has not been known from Egyptian monuments outside the Nile Valley. It may not be a coincidence that this reference to the two gods comes from a very fertile region in the Egyptian province of Canaan.

lines 4-5: Fairly common, litany-like attributes of the king.

line 6: It is tempting to take line 6 as referring to Egyptian building activity. The bellicose context of the following line would suggest some kind of fortification or residence for military personnel. Alternatively, one could assume an abbreviated spelling for *Jwn.tjw* “beduins, troglodytes”, and think of further praising of the king, who put the rebellious beduins “(back) to their place”.<sup>12</sup> One should then, however, normally expect an accusative construction, instead of the clumsy “to make them as beduins at their places”.

line 7: Compare phrases like “the rebels crushed, their strongholds destroyed”, “who causes the rebels to flee from their fortifications” (cf. DZA 22.934.260, 22.934.490). This could indicate actual fighting. Fitting allusions at historic events into the last lines of a stela, preceded by exceedingly long royal titulary and litany, is common practise. On the other hand, such wording may as well be part of the usual praise. In Ramesses’ II stela from Beth Shean, he is called “an effective wall for Egypt”: *sbtj pw mmj n Km.t*. The allusions in lines 6 and 7, positioned toward the end of the inscription, and taken in combination, would seem to opt more in favour of a reflection of actual events.

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<sup>12</sup> The spelling without determinative is possible, as is the archaizing use of *Jwn.tjw* for Syro-Palestinian population groups, in poetic style. The exact wording of this line, though, has no parallel. Cf. DZA 20.474.420, 20.474.550.

line 8: The free space below this line marks the bottom of the stela. Luckily the line preserves enough of the royal name for a safe identification. Moreover, the spelling can give us a clue for an approximate date. The element  was used exclusively in Ramesses' regnal years 2-20 (cf. Loffet 1999: 4 with further lit.).

From the known stelae of Ramesses II the one from Beth Shean has the regnal year 18 preserved.<sup>13</sup> From year 4 is a stela from Byblos and one of the rock stelae at Nahr al-Kalb. The second is dated to year 10, while the third has the date not preserved. The stela from al-Kiswa has the unexpected high year date 56.<sup>14</sup> That monument cannot possibly refer to any military campaign, all of which are recorded before the peace treaty with the Hittite Empire from year 21.<sup>15</sup> In fact, there is no safe evidence for any campaigns after year 10. The Beth Shean stela (year 18), in marked contrast to the two stelae of Sethos I, which report intense military activities, contains no such indications beyond the usual rhetorical formulae. That seems to infer that the monument was, like the al-Kiswa stela, erected already at times of peace, when Egyptian control over Canaan had been firmly established. The campaign of year 10 was directed along the Lebanese coast, as had also been the case in year 4, when Ramesses was underway to the Qadesh battle of year 5. In year 7 he was engaged in the region east of the Dead Sea (*KRI* II: 179-183; Darnell and Jasnow 1993), and in year 8 in an extensive campaign through Galilee and southern Syria (*KRI* II: 148-149). If we chose to take the allusions at fighting in the at-Turra stela at face value<sup>16</sup>, then it can most probably be related to that last mentioned event. The topographic list recording the captured towns of that campaign, at the pylon of the Ramesseum, is only partly preserved. At-Turra would fit well in the geographic context.

The site is actually only about 5 km southeast of Tell esh-Shihab (Fig. 3). Tell esh-Shihab rests prominently on top of a promontory formed by the junction of two wadis, *Wādī el-Bağge* and *Wādī eš-Šihāb* (the upper Yarmouk). The latter<sup>17</sup> forms the modern border between Syria

<sup>13</sup> The name spelling is exactly the same as in at-Turra.

<sup>14</sup> All other mentioned stelae do not preserve the date.

<sup>15</sup> In fact the text consists entirely of the royal names and titulary.

<sup>16</sup> In the discussion following the presentation, PROF. BIETAK opted for a solely rhetorical interpretation, while several other contributors, among them DR. WARBURTON, spoke out in favour of the historical option. For a recent discussion of New Kingdom Egyptian campaigning in Jordan see Warburton 2001.

<sup>17</sup> also called *Wādī et-Tell*, *Wādī el-Meddān*, *Wādī ez-Zēdi*.

and Jordan. If the stela from Tell esh-Shihab would not clearly belong to Sethos I, one would suspect that the at-Turra find belonged to the same monument, as part of the lower half. While this is excluded, it remains a strong possibility that Tell esh-Shihab is in fact the place of origin of the piece, which was at some stage transported to the near location of at-Turra, probably when the Maqam of Sheikh Khalil was built and in order to promote the significance of the structure.<sup>18</sup> This would render two stelae for Tell esh-Shihab, one of Sethos I and one of Ramesses II. The only other sites that have preserved stelae of both kings are Tyr and Beth Shean. It has previously been suspected that Tell esh-Shihab must have been an important site during the Bronze Age. NADAV NA'AMAN suggested to locate there the long searched-for Yeno'am, one of the most frequently mentioned Canaanite cities in New Kingdom sources.<sup>19</sup> Its obvious strategic position would indeed fit with its being fortified, as probably mentioned in the at-Turra stela.

Alternatively, it is obviously also possible to assume that at-Turra, which stretches over a hill, was itself an ancient site too, and the stela was originally erected there.<sup>20</sup> A look at the map (Fig. 4) reveals how the latest discoveries in al-Kiswa and at-Turra line up along a route, marked by at least four royal stelae, running through the Hauran northwards to Damascus. It is suggested that the itinerary descended south of the modern Syrian-Jordanian border down towards Pella and Beth Shean. The main Late Bronze Age route connection inland from Egypt, coming from the Red Sea, crossed Edom and Moab along the "Kings' highway", and then descended towards the northeastern region of the Dead Sea to link up with the Jordan Valley.<sup>21</sup> The region east of the Sea of Galilee and the upper Jordan was an important and central part of the Egyptian province of Canaan. The new discovery is another hint at how

<sup>18</sup> Several Roman spolia are also built in the walls of the mosque. In front of its entrance are two ancient tombstones inscribed in Greek and a Roman sarcophagus (Fig. 8).

<sup>19</sup> Na'am 1977. Yeno'am is involved in the events recorded in the stela of Sethos I from Beth Shean (year 1), and is well known from the so-called "Israel-stela" of Merenptah. Other suggested alternatives for its localisation are Tell en-Na'ame in the Hule Valley (north of the Sea of Galilee), Tel Yin'am (Tell en-Na'am) near Yavne'el (west of the Sea of Galilee), and Tell el-'Ubeidiye (south of the Sea of Galilee); cf. Ahituv 1984: 198-200. M. GÖRG has pointed out to me that the village en-Nu'eme, just east of Der'a, might also deserve consideration.

<sup>20</sup> Early considerations on the importance of at-Turra are noted in Wetzstein 1860: 84 n. 3. (I am grateful to PROF. MANFRED GÖRG for drawing my attention to this valuable resource and kindly making it available to me.)

<sup>21</sup> For new evidence related to this route, and in particular the section linking the "Kings' highway" with the Jordan Valley", see also Wimmer 2000, and now Strobel/Wimmer 2003: Abb. 21.

promising further archaeological investigations in northern Jordan and southern Syria, especially for the Late Bronze Age, would be.

**To sum up:** although the stela is incomplete and in a bad state of preservation, it can tentatively be attributed to Ramesses' II campaign in his year 8. It seems to mention Egyptian building activity at the site in military context, and its probable original provenance, Tell esh-Shihab, gains more weight as a candidate for the location of Yeno'am. It further outlines an itinerary from the Jordan Valley up to the Hauran and northwards to Damascus, and it strengthens the archaeological importance of the region. Being the first royal Egyptian monument from the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, it is a very major discovery for that country, at least.

## Egyptian royal stelae in the Levant<sup>22</sup>

### 1. Ramesside

#### 1.1 Sethos I

Location	Date	Description	Deities depicted (or mentioned)	Discovery and Collection
Beth Shean	year 1	complete	Ra-Harachte, (Month, Bastet, Amun)	1923; Jerusalem
Beth Shean	undated	upper part and left side missing, eroded	Ptah, (Khepri, Sachmet, Bastet, Amun-Ra)	1921; Jerusalem
Tyr	undated	2 fragments; small part of scene and incomplete text	-	1960s; Beirut
Tell Nebi Mond	undated	upper part, scene	Amun, Seth, Month, Hathor	1921; Aleppo
Tell esh-Shihab	undated	upper part, scene	Amun-Ra, Mut	1901; Istanbul

#### 1.2 Ramesses II

Location	Date	Description	Deities depicted (or mentioned)	Discovery and Collection
Nahr el-Kalb middle	year 4	rock-stela, text eroded	Ra-Harachte	in situ
Nahr el-Kalb south	year 10	rock-stela, text eroded	Amun	in situ
Nahr el-Kalb north	undated	rock-stela, text eroded, vandalized in 1860/61	Ptah	in situ
‘Adhlun	undated	rock-stela, text eroded, destroyed in war (WWII?)	Amun	in situ, now destroyed
Tyr	undated	upper part, only scene	Ra-Harachte-Atum	prior to 1975; Beirut
Tyr	undated	small fragment of text	-	1960s; Beirut
Byblos	year 4	2 large fragments of scene and text	(Month)	1919; Beirut
Beth Shean	year 18	complete	Amun-Ra, (Horus, Nut, Ra, Seth, Nubti, Amun, Month)	1923; Philadelphia
Beth Shean	undated	2 fragments of scene and text	-	1923, 1925; Jerusalem, Philadelphia

<sup>22</sup> I am grateful, for informations regarding stelae kept in Jerusalem, to BARUCH BRANDL and ALEGRE SAVARIEGO from the ISRAEL ANTIQUITIES AUTHORITY.

al-Kiswa	year 56	upper part missing	Atum or El, Seth-Baal, (Ptah-Tatenen, Seth, Ra-Harachte, Atum)	1994; Damascus
Sheikh Sa'ad	undated	complete, but badly eroded	El-?	1891; (unknown)
aṭ-Turra	undated	lower part, incomplete at three sides	(Nepri, Geb)	1999; in situ

## 2. Non-Ramesside

Location	Date	Description	Deities depicted (or mentioned)	Discovery and Collection
Euphrates near Carchemish	Thutmosis I	-	-	(attested in Annals of Th.III)
Euphrates near Carchemish	Thutmosis III	-	-	(attested in Annals of Th.III)
Byblos	Thutmosis III (?)	fragment of cartouche	-	between 1933-38; Beirut
Tell el-'Ureime	Thutmosis III (?) Amenophis II (?)	small fragment of text	-	1928; Kibbutz Deganya
Megiddo	Sheshonq I	fragment with cartouches	-	between 1925-29; Jerusalem

## ADDENDUM:

(March 2009)

The discovery of a new Ramesside inscription, possibly a stela, was reported in June 2008 in a brief press report by the Syrian news agency SANA (circulated on the *Agade mailing list* by JACK SASSON on 29 June 2008). The location is described as "on the outskirts of Damascus, 25 kilometres (15 miles) east (of the capital)". The 70 x 50 cm black basalt block is exhibited in the gardens of the National Museum Damascus. It is inscribed on two sides at 90° to each other. It does not appear to preserve a royal name, but the inscription concludes with the titles and name of the "troop commander and overseer of foreign lands Seti", a person who is known as Egyptian governor of Upu under Ramesses II. For this see a note in preparation for *Göttinger Miszellen*. – For the stela from Tell esh-Shihab see now Wimmer 2008.

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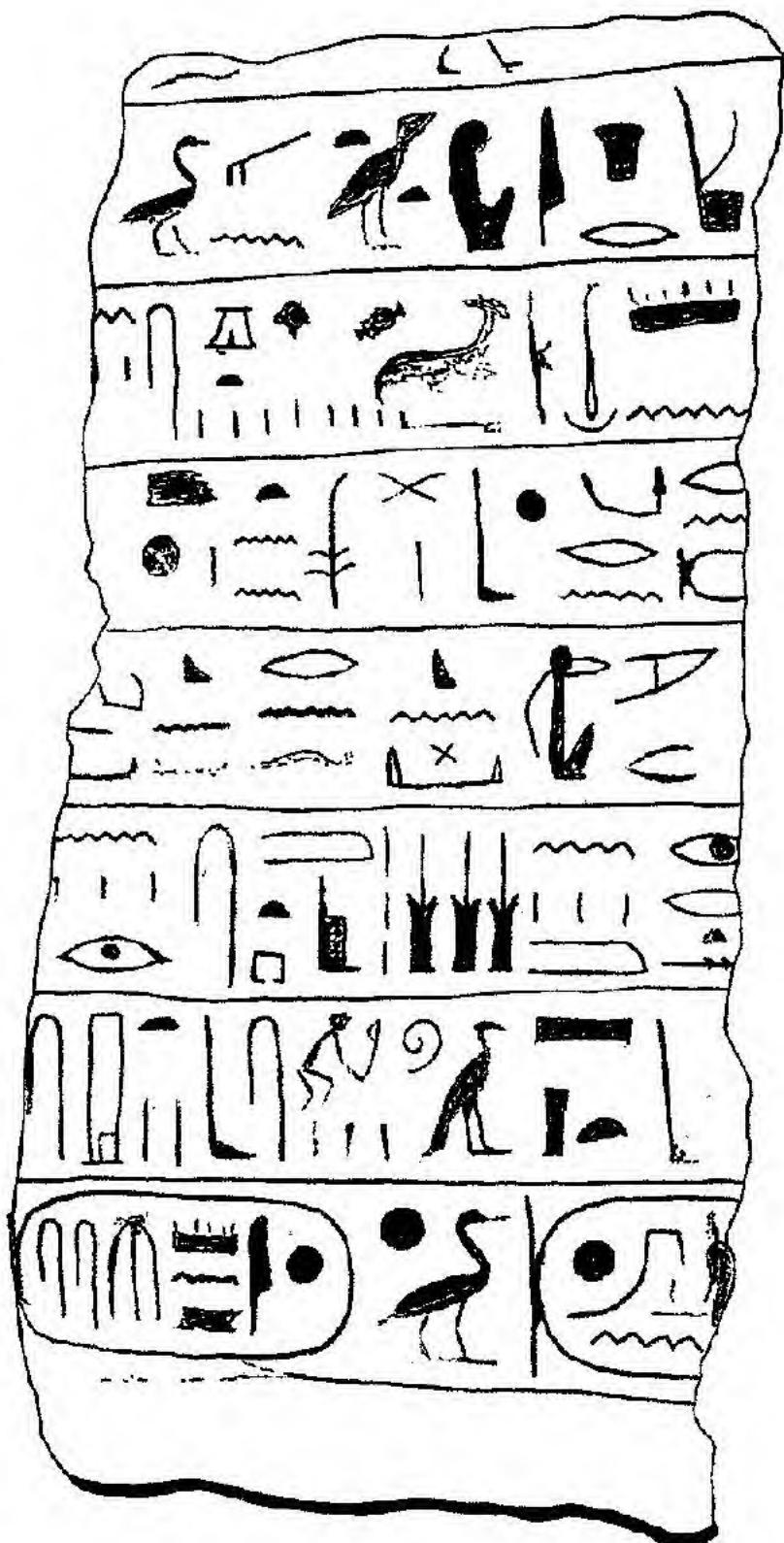


Fig. 1:

Facsimile of the at-Turra-stela, drawn from photographs and collated at the original; SJW.

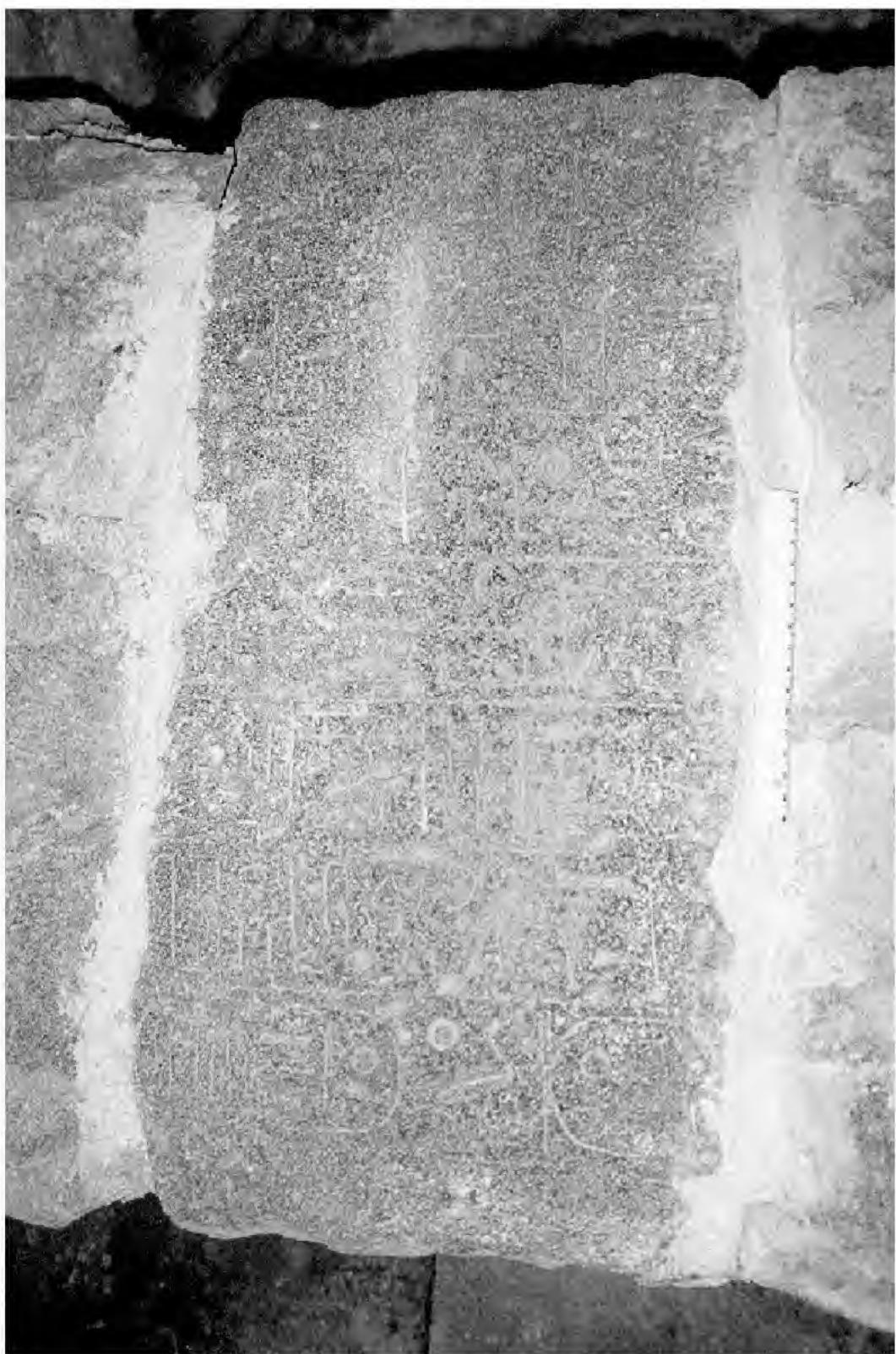


Fig. 2:  
The stela in its present position, turned by 90°; scale: 15 cm; SJW.

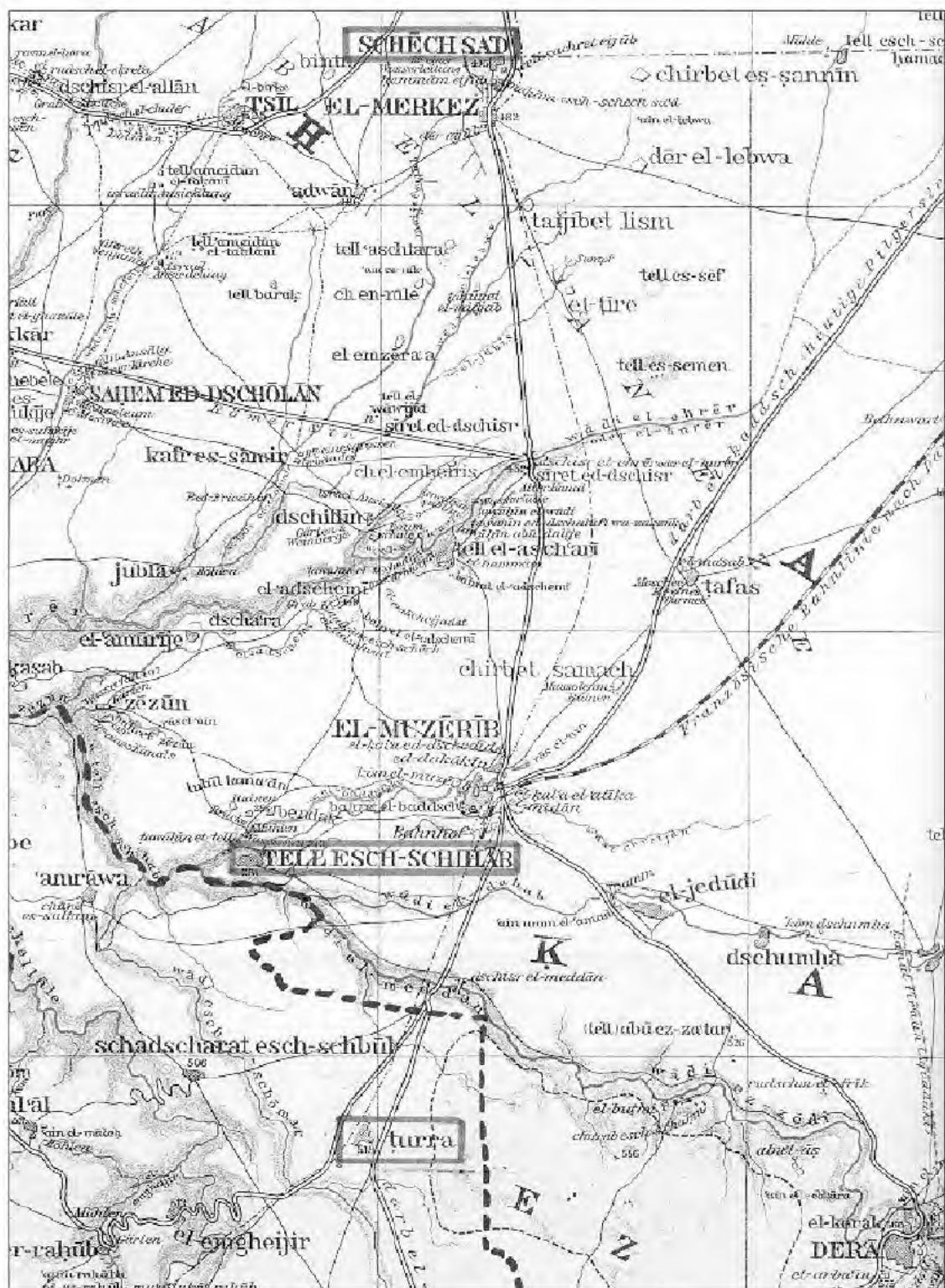


Fig. 3.

Fig. 3.  
Map of southern Hauran and northern Ajlun, 1895/96; Schumacher 1897. The marks of the locations of Sheikh Sa'ad, Tell esh-Shihab and aṭ-Turra, as well as the modern border line between Jordan and Syria, have been added.

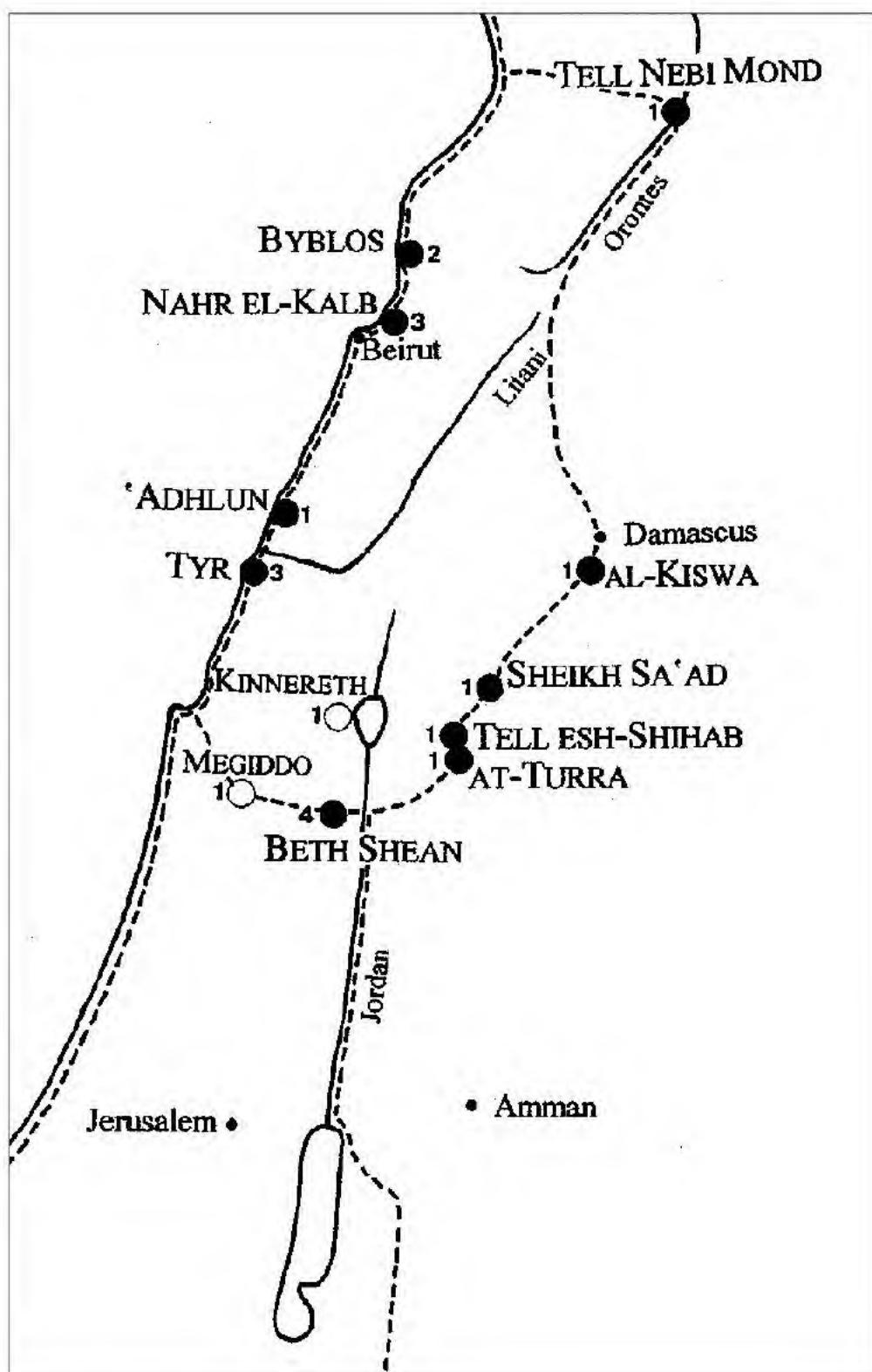


Fig. 4:  
 Locations of Egyptian royal stelae:  
 ● Ramesside   ○ Non-Ramesside  
 and the major route connections in the Late Bronze Age.

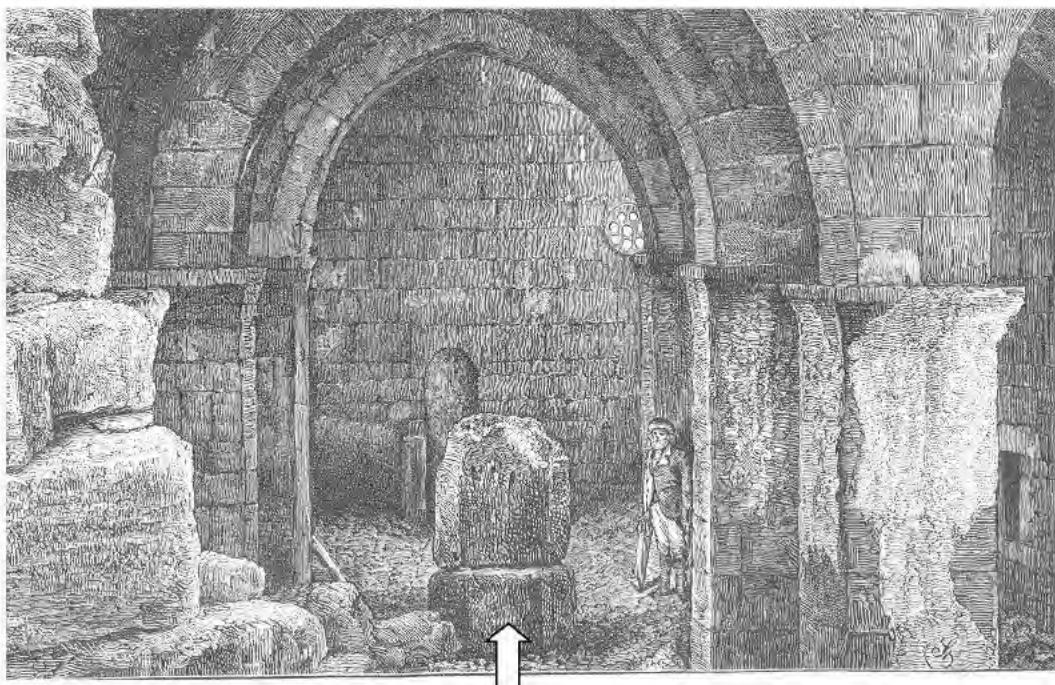


Fig. 5: The so-called “Stone of Job” in the centre of a mosque in Sheikh Sa’ad. Drawing after a photograph; Schumacher 1891: 146 fig. 3.



Fig. 6: The Sheikh-Khalil mosque of at-Turra, inside. The second block from bottom in the wall pillar is the stela, the arrow points at its inscribed face; SJW (5.4.2001).



Fig. 7: The Sheikh-Khalil mosque of at-Turra, outside; SJW.



Fig. 8: Roman sarcophagus, from the same local basalt as the stela, standing outside the mosque; SJW.